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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PODGORICA 000193

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SUBJECT: SERBIA TELLS MONTENEGRO TO HOLD OFF ON KOSOVO RECOGNITION

USUN, USEU, USNATO

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Serbian FM Jeremic appealed strongly to the GOM leadership 7/9 to not recognize Kosovo prior to the September UNGA. Jeremic laid out a plan whereby Serbia would persuade Russia to lift its opposition in the UNSC to EULEX in exchange for European assent to Serbia's effort to have the UNGA refer the matter of Kosovo to the ICJ. Under Jeremic's plan, during the 2-3 year period of ICJ deliberations, Serbia would gradually thaw relations with the U.S. and other countries, that recognized Kosovo, Montenegro and Macedonia would refrain from recognizing Kosovo, and Serbia would seek entry into the EU on the "Cyprus model." Jeremic implied to the GOM that leading EU countries supported the initiative. The Ambassador strongly urged the GOM to hold to its current path toward recognition, describing delay to and beyond the UNGA a recipe for uncertainty and instability. Macedonia and Montenegro continue to compare notes on the timing of recognition. END SUMMARY

¶2. (SBU) FM Rocen and Parliamentary President Krivokapic briefed the Ambassador July 10 and 11 on their conversations with visiting Serbian FM Jeremic on July 9. With both interlocutors, Jeremic appealed for the GOM not to recognize Kosovo before the UNGA, where Serbia hopes to get a majority of votes to refer the issue of Kosovo's independence to the ICJ. Once the case was referred to the ICJ, Jeremic reasoned, no additional states -- including presumably Montenegro and Macedonia -- would recognize Kosovo pending the outcome of the ICJ case. (Rocen and Krivokapic both said they told Jeremic they doubted that Serbia would have the necessary votes in the UNGA). Jeremic said that the GOS thinking was that, during the 2-3 years of ICJ deliberations, passions over Kosovo would subside in Serbia, and Belgrade would gradually thaw relations (e.g., return Ambassadors) with countries that had recognized Kosovo. Serbia would never recognize Kosovo, Jeremic said, but would seek to enter the EU according to a "Cyprus model." Also, Jeremic said that Serbia would ask Russia to lift its block in the UNSC on EULEX in exchange for European agreement not to actively block Serbia's efforts to have the UNGA refer Kosovo to the ICJ. Jeremic implied to his GOM interlocutors that leading EU states -- including Germany and the U.K. -- supported this approach.

¶3. (SBU) Both Rocen and Krivokapic sought the Ambassador's reaction to Jeremic's proposal. The Ambassador strongly urged both to adhere to Montenegro's current path toward recognition. The Serbian approach would simply prolong regional uncertainty

and instability and would perpetuate the belief in Serbia that the recognition of Kosovo could somehow be overturned. He noted that the USG had acknowledged Podgorica's earlier rationales for delay (e.g., the specific relationship with Serbia, elections in Montenegro and Serbia, the tourist season, etc.), but that a further indefinite delay of this nature would likely receive no support in Washington. It was time for the neighbors of Kosovo to recognize the new country and normalize relations with it.

¶4. (SBU) Although both threw out a few probably unworkable ideas as to how to at least partially satisfy the Serbian entreaty, both took note of the Ambassador's reaction and appeared to re-focus on how to get to recognition. The issue of moving together with Macedonia loomed larger than in previous discussions we have had with the GOM, perhaps stoked in part by several high-level interactions recently between Podgorica and Skopje. Krivokapic said a contemporaneous recognition by the two countries would be a "nice package" that would facilitate this decision in both countries. Rocen made the same point, but also reiterated that it would be easier to move ahead if EU countries - e.g., Portugal and Malta -- also recognized. He noted that he had discussed this with Carl Bildt in Dubrovnik last weekend.

¶5. (SBU) Rocen also said it would be helpful for Montenegro if the US (and EU) would send a strong message to Serbia not to cause problems for its neighbors in the event of their recognition of Kosovo.

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¶6. (SBU) Rocen also noted that the Russian Ambassador had been in earlier the same morning, but hadn't even raised the Jeremic visit. He also said that Thaci and Djukanovic had spoken on the margins of the Dubrovnik meeting. The GOM impression of Thaci was very positive: Rocen described the Kosovo PM as "reasonable and well-intentioned."

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The Jeremic visit has clearly provoked some waffling in Podgorica on recognition, an issue that is very challenging for a small country so heavily interlinked with Serbia. The opposition has also been loudly warning against recognition, although even FM Rocen acknowledged to the Ambassador that reaction to his trial balloon last week -- in which he strongly implied in a newspaper interview that Montenegro would recognize Kosovo -- was relatively mild. The GOM, with the exception of the President, is still strongly inclined toward recognition, however, and is looking for as much cover as possible to move ahead. We should consider ways to provide such cover, including urging consultations between Skopje and Podgorica, sending the sort of message to Belgrade that Rocen urged, helping the GOM leadership move ahead with NATO integration, etc.

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